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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TASHKENT 000532

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SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: OUTREACH TO DEMOCRACY ACTIVISTS

REF: A. STATE 44903

[1](#)B. 07 STATE 88465

[1](#)C. 07 STATE 108924

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Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Per reftel requests, we have summarized below efforts to implement the President's Freedom Agenda in Uzbekistan through outreach to democracy activists and dissidents. Democracy and human rights remain at the forefront of our agenda with the Uzbek government. The Ambassador and Emboffs continue to engage with human rights activists, members of the political opposition, and religious leaders whenever possible. In the past year, the Embassy has hosted several human rights-related events and provided small grants to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to promote human rights, develop civil society, and support journalists.

The Ambassador has promoted timely use of the Global Human Rights Defenders' Fund to provide emergency assistance to defenders in need and has encouraged Emboffs to attend trials of human rights activists and religious figures. In order to continue to effectively promote human rights and democratization in Uzbekistan, we believe that recent budget cutbacks for programs that focus on these issues should be reversed. In addition, while we recognize that Uzbekistan's overall human rights record remains poor, we have come to the conclusion that more is achievable on human rights and democratization through engagement and discussion with the government, than through increased isolation. End summary.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY GOALS IN UZBEKISTAN

[1](#)2. (U) Democracy and human rights remain at the forefront of our agenda with the Uzbek government. In our discussions with government officials and others, we consistently seek to promote respect for human rights and to prevent abuses, especially the use of torture in the investigative process and abuse in prisons. We also seek to promote a strong civil society sector and freedom of the press; encourage political pluralism, legal reform, and accountability; and promote religious freedom.

EFFORTS TO ENGAGE ACTIVISTS AND DISSIDENTS

¶3. (U) The Ambassador and emboffs continue to engage with human rights activists and dissidents whenever possible. The Ambassador has met with activists, members of the political opposition, and leaders of religious groups that have suffered discrimination and harassment. Emboffs continue to meet with such contacts on a daily basis. In addition, the Embassy has hosted several human rights related events in the past year. In honor of Human Right's Day in December, the Embassy held a roundtable for several prominent human rights activists and the Ambassador hosted a reception for over 70 government, diplomatic, and human rights contacts. For the rollout out of the 2007 Human Rights Report in March 2008, the Embassy hosted a roundtable at which the Ambassador engaged with over twenty human rights contacts, including prominent local activists, NGO representatives, and diplomatic colleagues. One of the more prominent local human rights groups also presented their own annual human rights report at the event.

¶4. (U) The Ambassador and DCM have encouraged every high-level U.S. government delegation visiting Uzbekistan to meet with human rights organizations and religious leaders, including the Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs in March 2008, Commander of Central Command (CENTCOM) Admiral Fallon in January 2008, the Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom in June 2007, and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs in February 2007.

ASSSISTANCE TO HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY ACTIVISTS

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¶5. (U) Through its Democracy Commission, post provides small grants to local NGOs and human rights organizations for ongoing projects. For example, in the past year, the Commission has provided funding to local groups to investigate human rights abuses and resolve cases with local government; open centers offering free legal assistance; and create a medical worker coordination center to monitor prison conditions and advocate against torture. The Ambassador emphasized publicly that support for NGOs and human rights activists is not aimed at regime change, but rather at promoting reform and human rights.

¶6. (U) The Democracy Commission also awarded small grants to NGOs and medial outlets for projects designed to develop civil society institutions and mass media. In addition, journalists continue to participate in U.S.-sponsored training sessions and exchange programs focused on media freedom. Emboffs regularly host discussions with local journalists and others on media in the United States and the importance of press freedom. The Ambassador and other emboffs engage with the government on decreasing government harassment and arrests of independent journalists and human rights activists.

¶7. (U) Post vigorously engages in highlighting respect for religious tolerance and pluralism through exchanges, contact with religious leaders and institutions, and distribution of informational materials. The Ambassador and emboffs monitor cases and maintain contact with imams, priests, rabbis, educators, and independent religious leaders. The Embassy hosted discussions of religious freedom, tolerance, and Islam in America. The Ambassador and emboffs consistently emphasized to government counterparts that religious tolerance and political security are complimentary goals.

USE OF GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER FUND

¶8. (C) The Ambassador has promoted timely use of the Global

Human Rights Defenders' Fund to provide emergency assistance to defenders in need. In the past year, post has vetted and submitted a number of applications to the Global Fund, and several human rights contacts have been provided with emergency medical and legal assistance.

TRIAL MONITORING EFFORTS

¶9. (U) Although embassies are frequently (but not always) barred from court rooms, the Ambassador has continued to encourage them to attempt to attend trials with human rights and religious freedom implications. Embassies also coordinate with other diplomatic missions, especially from the European Union, to monitor court cases and press the government to hold trials meeting international standards.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) Although funding for democracy projects worldwide has doubled since 2001, funding for such programs in Uzbekistan and Central Asia continues to decline. USAID's budget for democracy programs in Uzbekistan was reduced from 5.08 million in fiscal year 2007 to 2.97 million in fiscal year 2008, a 42 percent cut. USAID's overall budget for democracy programs in Central Asia was reduced by 14 percent. The Embassy's budget for its Democracy Commission small grants program, upon which some local human rights groups depend on as their sole source of funding, was also cut in fiscal year 2008. In order to most effectively promote democratization and human rights in Uzbekistan, it is imperative that such budgets cutbacks be reversed in the near future.

¶11. (C) Uzbekistan's overall human rights record remains poor, and the country provides a very challenging environment for the promotion of democracy. Nevertheless, we have come to the conclusion that more is achievable on human rights and

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democratization through engagement and discussion with the government, than through increased isolation. The viewpoint is justified, we believe, by the modest human rights steps the government has taken since relations began to thaw in late 2007 (septel). Through our interactions with activists, we have learned that this view is shared by many, but not all, human rights defenders on the ground.

¶12. (C) We will continue to provide assistance to important civil society actors, including human rights defenders and independent journalists, and advocate for political rights and civil liberties. We also will continue to provide emergency assistance to human rights defenders in need through the Global Fund. We believe that sustainable, societally embedded political rights, rule of law, and civil liberties will be possible only when a critical mass of Uzbek citizens inculcate them and demand nothing less of their government.

NORLAND